2402 Doubtless  
The world shook and shook as the Cursed Tyrant and the Sacred shade clashed. The immense vastness of Condemnation was straining against the gargantuan pillars of black silk that bound its limbs, while the Puppeteer straddled its chest, reaching for the giant's face.  
  
It seemed to have the upper hand at the moment, but the shadow of Condemnation was already retaliating. Even if it could not break the countless strands of silk, it had already began assimilating them.  
Everything that touched Condemnation was condemned to become a part of it, and the black silk was no exception.  
  
But was the Puppeteer an exception?  
Sunny did not know, and he did not have time to observe the battle between the Tyrants - one living, one dead - closely. Because his only chance to free himself from the invisible strings cast by the Puppeteer was now, while the accursed moth was distracted by the shadow of Condemnation.  
Sadly.  
  
Contrary to his hopes, the Puppeteer did not seem distracted at all. Even while fighting the titanic foe, it maintained flawless control of its strings - in fact, their silken vice had only grown more crushing, making Sunny reel and sway at the edge of the abyss.  
He could feel the last shreds of certainty slipping away from him. He was not even entirely sure of who he was anymore.  
Once he lost himself entirely, he would truly and utterly turn into an obedient puppet of the harrowing black moth.  
'I. refuse!'  
As the invisible strings sliced him apart, Sunny continued to fight them, to exterminate the doubt plaguing his mind, and to strive to break free.  
All the things he had done to gain freedom, everything that he had sacrificed to break his chains. And what, he would become a damn insect's toy?  
Sunny raged against his doubt, against the invisible strings, tearing more and more of himself apart to escape them.  
But what was the point?  
The strings were unbreakable.  
It was all hopeless.  
The suffering was overwhelming.  
'Ah.'  
  
He knew suffering well. From the cruel expanse of the Forgotten Shore, no, from even earlier than that. From the suffocating maze of the outskirts until now, every step he took was accompanied by unbearable pain.  
That was life. That was the truth of his existence. Of all existence. An endless struggle to fuel the Flame, an endless struggle that was the Flame, a terrible furnace that endlessly devoured itself to continue devouring, struggling, and burning.  
  
An endless, vile, self-sustaining curse, So wasn't it. Wasn't it enough?  
Did he really have to suffer more? To struggle more?  
Struggle.  
Did he not deserve to stop struggling, for once?  
Sunny shivered, enveloped by the invisible strings. The strings were wrapped tightly around him, their cold touch promising peace and solace.  
'.No.'  
It wasn't enough.  
Solace was a sin. Peace was death.  
Stop struggling?  
'Like hell!'  
Sunny would only stop struggling when he was dead.  
And he was technically already dead - so.  
He was never going to stop.  
Never!  
Life was a struggle? Living hurt?  
'Good!'  
Pain was a gift. As long as he could feel pain, he knew that he was still alive.  
So what if the Flame needed fuel to burn? Sunny himself was a part of the Flame - all of existence was - so why would he want to starve and extinguish himself?  
Why would he not want to burn as brightly as he could, to pursue his desires as passionately as he could, to feed the flame with his longing?  
That was life.  
Why would he not want to live?  
'Damn moth. get the hell out of my head, you lying wretch!'  
The vast shadow surged, ripping the strings apart. Countless strands of silk broke.  
But not enough of them to set him free.  
However, by resisting as desperately as he could, Sunny did buy himself time.  
And a few seconds later.  
A graceful figure suddenly appeared nearby, her long braid whipping in the wind. Slayer skirted the tendrils of silk, dashing between them like a dancer, and reached him in an instant.  
Landing on the snow near Sunny, she glanced at him briefly, her onyx eyes shining with sincere, murderous purity.  
Then, her twin swords fell down, slicing through the invisible strings that bound him in place. Empowered by ash, her strike carried an undeniable finality - the sharp blades sliced through countless threads of silk, and suddenly, Sunny could move again.  
  
As the two titanic creatures battled on the slope of the fracturing mountain, the shadows behind them seethed and surged.  
"Free. Kai."  
The hiss that resounded from the shadows did not sound like a human voice. It washed over the world, making Slayer take a step back.  
She lingered for a moment, then dashed in the direction of a hill of black silk under which Kai was buried. Countless strings shot to bind her. But she skirted those of them that were tangible, while those of them that were so thin аs to be invisible simply fell powerlessly after touching her ebony skin.  
After all, Slayer had managed to survive thousands of years in the Shadow Realm, Other shadows had lost themselves to its dark expanse, but even in the embrace of death, she never did - even if her memories were gone, she always remained uncompromising, the pure nature of her unblemished spirit tolerating no doubt.  
Sunny, meanwhile, rose and manifested into a towering colossus.  
  
Well. It was a little presumptuous, to call himself a colossus when the shadow of Condemnation and Puppeteer were nearby. Compared to them, his Shadow Colossus form - even though it was taller than ever before - seemed certifiably puny.  
But the power boiling inside him was anything but. Most of the sun was already hidden behind the horizon, and the mountain was enveloped in a gargantuan cocoon of black silk - surrounded by darkness, the Evening Star had almost reached its apogee.  
.It was still enough, though.  
Slayer might have cut the strings binding Sunny, and he might have torn countless strings apart himself.  
But more were already rushing at him, ready to pierce him and infect him with doubt.  
No. To win this fight, he had to do more.  
To be more.  
Or be different, at least.  
Sunny glanced up, at the two battling deities.  
And then, he did something he had been wary of. Frightened of. For a long, long time.'